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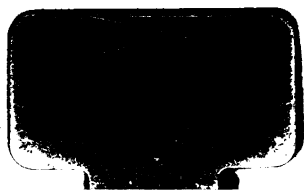
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So he gave a "mew, mew!" as if to say, "All right, Goody!"—P. 38.

GOODY PLATTS,

AND

HER TWO CATS.

A TALE IN WORDS OF ONE AND TWO SYLLABLES.

BY

THOMAS MILLER.

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GOODY PLATTS,

AND

HER TWO CATS.

SIT down, my little dears, and I'll tell you all about my old cat, and my young one, which will never be like his mother, live as long as he may. Poor old Browney and I had lived in this cottage a many, many years by ourselves, and we knew each others's ways ; for we both had our tempers, and there were times, though not very often, when I would scold her, and she would spit and swear at me. But we soon made it up, and sat down by the fire again the very best of friends. Then I used to stroke her, and say, "I hope you'll never do so again ;" and sometimes she would give a "mew," as if in her way she said, "No, I won't." But she did, though, for all that.

Of course, it was very trying to one's patience when she came in out of the muddy garden in rainy

weather, and left her dirty footmarks on the clean white quilt I had just put on my bed, or paddled about with her feet until she made herself a place on my pillow, when I had just put on a clean pillow-case. Or when I had put away a nice piece of steak, or a chop, or a bit of cold meat for my next day's dinner, it was very trying to one's temper, not only to find she had stolen it, but had dragged down the plate or dish it stood on, and perhaps broken two or three others beside all to smash: no wonder if at such times I said, "Oh, drat that cat!" and told her to get out before I beat her; and said I would do I don't know what, though I never meant it, for I was too fond of Browney to hurt even a hair of her tail.

Then I used to cool down a bit, and was ready to fall out with myself for having lost my temper; and I would give myself a good talking to, and say, "It was very silly of you, Goody Platts, to go and leave the meat within the cat's reach, for, old as you are, you ought to know better. When Browney found it, perhaps she thought you had saved it for her, and would have given it her had you not forgot." And that, my dears, would be a very good reason for a cat to give to herself for taking it, and would not, in her mind, be at all like stealing.

Sometimes, when she stayed out rather long, I used to say to her, "Are you named

your face at this hour, when all honest cats are at home ? I was just thinking about saying my prayers and going to bed, and making up my mind that if you mewed at the window ever so long, I would not run the risk of catching a cold by getting out of bed to let you in, as I have done, making me sneeze again, until I shake all the bones in my poor old body. And I tell you once again, that if you will stop out so late for your own pleasure, you shall stay out a little later for mine. Where will you find such a nice bed, I should like to know, as I have made you out of my old quilted skirt, which is lined with red flannel ? There isn't one cat out of a hundred hardly that's got such a bed as you've got ; and as for living, no matter what I've got, nor how nice it is, I always give you a taste, don't I ? And as for milk, Farmer Giles sends it every morning warm from the cow ; and what more you would have, I don't know. There, go to bed, and let me have no more of this."

But I used to let her in, in spite of all my threats, for my bark was always a good deal worse than my bite, and I couldn't abear to hear her mewing outside the window all in the cold night air, while I was tucked up so warm and cozy in bed. But the worst of it was, when she went out she made friends with other cats that led a very loose life, and kept all sorts of late hours, and perhaps at times never went

home at all, but, as reckless people say, who have no respect for their own selves, went "and made a night of it." And very often one or other of these sad scape-graces would, after I had got out of bed and let her in, stand calling her to come out and play, for whole hours at a time; and sometimes she would make a noise to be let out, or try to get through the window; and then I was forced to get out of bed again in the cold, and fasten her up in the cupboard, sneezing all the time so bad, that I sometimes sneezed out the candle I had lighted, and made the bed-curtains shake again. No wonder I spoke cross to her at such times, for often when I'd fastened her up in the cupboard, she would mew and scratch so to get out, that you would hardly believe it, after all my kindness in getting up to let her in. And what with her mewings and scratching in-doors, and the other cats calling to her to come out, I'm sure I might as well have been in Bedlam for what rest I got; for how could a body get a wink of sleep with such a row? Sometimes those strays outside kept up their cat-concert so long, and with such loud voices, as to make me so cross that I got out of bed, and pushed open the window very softly with one hand, while I held a jug of water in the other to throw over them; and very often it would so happen that instead of giving the cats a good wetting, I only hit the win-

dow, when the water beat back again all over my face and my night-dress, until I was as dripping wet as if I had been dipped in a river. Then I was forced to change my things, and glad enough to get back into bed again ; when, I do believe, the nasty cats went on worse than ever, and I fancied I could almost hear them saying, as they kept on "mauling," "Won't old Goody have a precious cold after this ? She'll almost shake down her old cottage, through sneezing and coughing." And sometimes the jug got broken, through my hitting the window-frame, and I dare say the cats laughed at me, as I stood there with the water running down my poor old nose, and only the jug handle dangling between my fingers. So you see, all I got, my dears, through being cross, was a good wetting, and a broken jug ; and then I used to comfort myself through thinking, that many a one had fared worse than I had done through losing their temper ; for there's nothing to be got through being cross, but a good deal to lose.

But let me see—where was I before I got to muddling my poor old brains about those nasty stray cats ? Ah ! I know now. I began by telling you about my poor Browney that's dead and gone, and that had lived with me so many years. Poor thing ! I did all I could for her before she died. Her illness began with a cold in her head, which caused her to sneeze,

and made her eyes water ; and as I always put on a flannel night-cap when I had a cold in my head, and found great relief from it, I thought it would be a good thing to put one on my poor old Browney. So I got my housewife out of my pocket, in which I kept my needles and scissors and bodkin, and all my sewing things and bits of patterns, and having measured her head, I cut out a nice little flannel cap for her, and put strings on it to tie under her poor old jaws, and made two holes in it for her ears to come through ; and I could hardly help laughing when I put it her on, she looked so much like a little old man, who had never been shaved or had his face washed since the day he was born. But she soon got used to it, though it didn't cure her cold, as I was in hopes it would ; so I tried to put her feet in warm water, for doctors say that's a very fine thing to draw the cold from out of the head. Well, my dears, I got a bason full of nice warm water, and no sooner had I got one foot in with a good deal of care and a great deal of coaxing, than she began to swear, jump up, and upset all the water over her nice bed, which was made of my thick quilted petti-coat, lined with red flannel, and I had that to dry for my pains, beside cleaning up my hearth again, which was all of a swim. I had some thoughts of putting a mustard poultice on her poor chest, for she wheezed

and seemed to breathe with great trouble. But as she could never bear to touch a mite of meat that had the least bit of mustard on it, I thought when it began to draw, she might get to licking it off, and that it would bite her tongue, and so not agree with her.

Many people will think me a silly old woman, for making such a fuss about my poor Browney. But if they had lived with her so many years as I have done, and only our two selves in the house, and no one else to speak to, they would have been as sorry to lose her as I was, if they had but right and proper feelings; and have been glad to have talked to her when she was alive, if only to have heard the sound of their own voice. I never spoke to Browney but what she pricked up her ears; and if she didn't know all I said to her, she looked as if she tried very hard to make it out. Then she was a cat that thought a great deal. That I could tell by her looks, which were as grave as a judge's when she sat beside me, and we were both blinking and winking before the fire. Sometimes I said to her, "A penny for your thoughts, pussy! Was you thinking where that mouse had gone to, that run away from you this morning? or if I had got anything nice for you in the pantry? or what Wadding is doing now?" Wadding was one of her kittens, my dears, and was so called because he

had a great deal of white about him, and looked like a lump of wadding when he was quite a little thing, and coiled up asleep. He was staying with Farmer Giles at the time I lost poor Browney : but I shall have a good deal to tell you about him by-and-by.

Poor old Browney ! How she used to purr, and come running against me, when she was well, leaning on one side, and pressing with all her weight against my quilted petti-coat, and going round and round, until I used to say to her, " Yes, I know you are very fond of me ; but you'll make yourself quite dizzy if you keep on turning round that way, and be having a fit." For cats have fits at times, my dears, and very shocking it is to see them laying on their sides, and kicking about in so much pain ; and I never saw a poor dumb animal in pain in my life without feeling pity for it. And I'm sure no one can ever feel happy who is unkind to the very meanest of God's creatures, and more so those that seem to be trusted to our care ; for He who made us watcheth over all, and we cannot tell but what He loveth all alike that His hand hath made ; for we read in the Holy Bible that not even a poor little sparrow can fall to the ground and escape His All-seeing eye.

Poor old Browney ! she got worse and worse, and could hardly mew at all at last, though she opened

her mouth and tried to answer me when I spoke to her. Ah ! it was a great trouble to me ; but she went off at last as quiet as a lamb when it falls asleep, and I dare say towards the end she felt no pain. I don't think it any shame to say that I shed a great many tears for my dear old cat, and that once in the night, after she was dead, I thought I heard her mew, and got out of bed, and lighted my candle, and went to see ; but no, it wasn't her, for there she lay, just where I had left her, as cold as ice, as stiff as a poker, and as still as a stone ; and when I held the candle over her, I said, " Poor dear old Browney ! I shall never hear thee mew again in this world." Then I went back to bed, and cried myself to sleep.

" All the fretting in the world won't bring Browney to life again," I said to myself next day ; " and I've always been a stirring woman, and it only makes me feel worse moping about the house in this way. I'll bury her, and have Wadding home, and try to think about her as little as I can." So saying, I dried my eyes on my check apron, and undid my housewife again, taking out my strongest needle and my stoutest whitey-brown thread, so as to make her a coffin out of an old paste-board box I used to keep my muslins in, and which she once kittened in when I left the lid off, all among my caps, and sleeves, and nice fine things that I only put on of a Sunday, or when I

went out to see a friend, or had one home to drink a dish of tea with me, or went once a week to Farmer Giles's, to see how little Wadding, her kitten, was getting on. Well, I made her a nice long coffin out of my old lace-box, and sewed it up very strong, and made a lid to it ; and little Jack Hardy, who runs my errands at times, when the weather is wet, or it's too cold for me to go out, got some pretty flowers out of my garden, and put them all round her ; for she was very fond of flowers, and would stretch herself out on my borders for hours at a time in the sunshine ; and as she had fine long smellers, I suppose she took as much pleasure in smelling of them as I did. Who can tell ? I suppose they wouldn't have been called smellers if she couldn't have smelt with them. Jack said she couldn't very well smell without them when she was alive, unless I had clipped them off, which was quite true. So Jack took my garden-spade, and dug her a grave under my old Cat's-head apple-tree.

I wonder why such an ugly name was ever given to an apple-tree—so many pretty names as there are to pick and choose from ? and I have often thought some cruel wretch, like Bluebeard, cut off all the cat's heads that came into his garden, and buried them under one of his apple-trees, and that they caused the apples to grow as big as they do, and so they were called Cat's-head apples, for they often

grow as large as a cat's head. After we had buried Browney, Jack brought a piece of slate, which he had chipped round at the top like a tombstone, and we both sat down by the fire to make a verse to put on the slate, which I said should tell the truth about her, if it did nothing else ; for I think it's very wrong, and very wicked, to put anything on a tombstone, whether it be a cat's or anything else's, that isn't the truth. They say we should never speak ill of the dead ; but putting on a stone what isn't true is speaking very ill indeed of them ; for what is there worse than not telling the truth ? When I made a verse for Browney's tombstone, I didn't sit down to count my finger-ends, as some of them poet-people are said to do, but I got Jack to get the poker, and sing a very old song I had often heard in my younger years, and to keep beating the poker to the tune of "Old John Brown is dead and gone, and we never shall see him more ;" and as there couldn't be a better nor a truer line, and one that came so near to what I wanted to say, and that was so little trouble to alter, I took and turned "Old John Brown" to "Poor Old Browney," which did as well, if not better, than if I had made it all out of my poor old head. So while Jack kept on humming the tune, and beating the poker, I kept on writing, and turning one word out and putting a new word in, until at last I finished it ; and though I say it

that should not, I thought it was done very well, and I was sure it was all true. And this is what I made, and what Jack scratched on the slate with my scissors' point :—

“ Poor old Browney's dead and gone,
And we never shall see her more ;
She used to wash her old brown coat
Behind as well as before.

Her bed was my old quilted skirt ;
She died inside my house,
And the worst crime she ever did,
Was killing a bird or a mouse.”

Every word of which, I believe, was very true, for she never would attack a rat, though she often killed my little chickens ; but you know a chicken is a bird. Our Sexton, who has made a great many verses in his time for the Stone-mason to put on his tombstones, said the lines were very good indeed, and he didn't think I had so much talent in me. And what a thing pride is, my dears ! for I felt so puffed up with what he said, that I wasn't even honest enough to tell him how much of it I had taken from the song of “ Old John Brown.” Oh, it's very bad, my dears, to wish to be thought clever in things that you haven't done ! But so it is at times, I'm afraid, with the best of us.

And now I must tell you how, after I had buried poor old Browney, I set off to fetch home little Wadding, as I called him, though by this time he was quite as big as his poor mother. He had been running about Farmer Giles's great farm-yard, and romping all over his barns and sheds and cow-houses, and living on the fat of the land for months, and a fine cat he was. It wasn't more than a mile across the fields from Mr. Giles's farm to my cottage, and I had always made it a point to go once a week to see Wadding, for Farmer Giles was a very old friend of my husband's—poor good man! They called him Gaffer Platts, the same as they called me Goody. I always took Wadding a bit of something nice and tasty in my pocket, and he knew me so well, that no matter what he might be doing, he would come running up to me the moment he heard my voice.

Ah! you should have seen Farmer Giles's barn, my dears! it would have made your neck ache to look up at it, for it was as high as the inside of a church, and the doors were so lofty, that a great piled-up waggon-load of corn could be driven inside at harvest-time without taking off a single sheaf, and with a man standing straight up on the top of the sheaves as well. So I tucked up my gown-skirt that it might, not draggle down the grass seeds, as it was near hay-

making-time ; and I took my horn-hafted walking-stick, which had been my poor Gaffer's, and was quite bright through holding it so many years in his hand, and resting on it ; and I put on my old horn-rimmed spec-tacles, so that I might see well about me, and off I set, to fetch home my young cat, Wadding.

I can't tell you all the nice things I took for him in my little basket,—a piece of fresh beef-steak, cut nice and small, and part of a cold fowl I killed on purpose, and had had the other portion for my dinner the day before, beside a bottle, which I knew Farmer Giles would be kind enough to fill for Wadding with his rich new milk. I had made up my mind that Wadding should follow me home over the fields, instead of being shut up in a basket, which would be as bad as a prison, or worse, to him ; and as it was such a pretty road, I thought he would enjoy the walk quite as much as I should, with all the nice things I had brought for him, and a saucer to lap his milk out of as well, Oh, deary me ! little did I think, as I went over those pleasant fields, the trouble I should have with that cat before I got home again. But there's nothing done without trouble hardly in this world, unless it be letting the fire go out—is there ? And then there's the trouble of lighting it again, if you want your kettle to boil, and make

yourself a nice dish of tea. Oh, that Wadding! that Wadding! the trouble the old woman had to drive her pig home from market was easy to what I had to go through to get home with my young cat.

I wished when it was too late I had taken Farmer Giles's advice, for he said, "I dare say Wadding will follow you so long as he's able to eat anything, and you have a mind to feed him. But I know what he is; he'll be after everything that moves, if it only be a dead leaf that is blown away on the footpath." And so it proved. But we all of us are too apt to think our own way is the best, and when we find out it is not, very few of us are honest enough to own that we were in the wrong; and if that isn't pride, why, it's something quite as bad.

We got over the first field well enough, for little Wadding went trotting beside me just like a pet lamb that I once had, which would follow me anywhere. Of course I kept talking to him all the time, and now and then stooped down to stroke him, while he rubbed against me and purred just as poor old Browney used to do. When we came to the stile, he made a dead stop, though he could get through just as easy as he could run into Farmer Giles's great barn when the doors were wide open; so I got over first, after a great deal of trouble, for those stiles are awkward things for an old woman to cross with a basket, and

a bottle of milk, and her horn-handled staff, and her spec-tacles on to see where she puts her feet. And just as I got over, my spec-tacles fell off on the other side ; and as I couldn't see to find them, I had to climb back again, and feel about for them, and to keep crying, "Puss, puss, pussy !" all the time, for fear the cat should run back to the farm. Wadding came up to me while I was feeling about for my spec-tacles, which I found among the grass ; and after crossing the stile once more, I called, "Meat, meat !" when he came through, and I gave him two or three nice bits of raw steak, which were as tender as a chicken, and so we got on well enough until we came to an old thorn beside the footpath, when he made a spring forward, and then stopped all of a sudden, and began to switch his tail about as if he had missed something, and wasn't very well pleased. I stooped down to look, and saw a little hole which seemed to run under the roots of the old thorn, and had no doubt it was a little long-tailed field-mouse he had seen and made a spring at, and that it had run into its nest under the tangled roots, where it was as safe as a worm asleep under a gate-post.

But Wadding would squat down and keep watch for it coming out beside the hole, and all the "Puss-pussing" in the world wouldn't persuade him to budge an inch until he pleased ; though I said to him, "You

silly cat, if you knew what a cupboard he keeps inside, you wouldn't sit watching there. Why, he could stay in his hole for a month or more without ever once coming out, if he liked, for he lays up food enough near his nest to last him all winter. Seeds of any kind, corn in harvest-time, and nuts—nothing he can eat but he has a large hoard of. You'll be tired first, I can tell you ; and if you were to sit there watching until this day week, I dare say he would come and peep at you from his hole after each meal he had made, then run back laughing again into his nest, to think what a goose you was to expect him to come out while you were there, and with such a larder as he has got to run to." So what with talking to him, and stroking him, and giving him a drop of milk, I coaxed him away from the hole, which might have been that of a field-mouse or a dormouse, for I couldn't well tell which, though they are both alike for keeping a well-stocked cupboard, if it only be filled with acorns and hay-seeds.

Well, my dears, after a deal of trouble and much patience I got him very nearly across the next field, when what should give a jump just under his nose but a poor frog ! Wadding didn't seem to know what to make of him at all, but stood looking at it after the first smell, as if to say, "Why, you are neither fish, flesh, nor fowl." Then the poor frog gave a squeak, as much as to say, "I know that, and you would find

me very cold eating, and wouldn't like me a bit; so just keep back while I give a few more jumps and get into yonder ditch that runs under the plank beside the stile; then I'll show you what I can do, for there's plenty of water there." So the frog kept leaping, and Wadding keeping close behind, and staring at him with all the eyes he'd got, until at last he got to the edge of the ditch, when he kicked up his heels as if to say, "Do that, old fellow, and follow me if you dare!" and under the water he went head first, and was out of sight before one could say "boo" to a goose. How Wadding did stare and swear, surely, and switch his tail about, as much as to say, "If I'd known you was going to escape in that way, I would have given you a scratch, slippery as your back looked." And I do believe the frog making a hole in the water where there wasn't one to be seen before, so muddled and puzzled the brains of Wadding, that he went over the plank and under the stile into the next field without ever thinking at all about which way he was going, or anything else but the way the frog made himself a hole to escape by, for he looked up to me and mewed, as much as to say, "I've seen a great many strange things about the barn and out-houses, but never such a great straddling fellow as that, spreading his ugly legs out like a spider, then making a great hole with just one knock of his head, and closing it again so tight and

snug with just one kick of his heels, that we couldn't, if it were to save our lives, say he went in just there, for there isn't so much as a loose bit of earth to swear to. I wish I were back again once more mousing in the barn, or catching birds behind the corn and hay-ricks in the farm-yard, for one does know what they are when we get hold of 'em. Mew, mew, mew !"

So I stooped down and stroked him, and gave him a bit or two of the beef-steak, and said to him, "There, that's a good deal better than all the frogs in the world ; and you are not a French cat, that has had such things thrown to you under the table at meal times ; for I have heard that there are people in foreign parts abroad who eat such things, while for my part I couldn't touch them unless it were with a pair of tongs, without I were starving ; for I was never able to tell a frog from a toad, though I believe there is no harm in either of them, in spite of what some folk say, though they wouldn't be so pleasant as a warming-pan to find in one's bed, or inside a nightcap on a cold night. But how long do you mean to keep me here sitting on the step of the stile waiting for you ?" For do you know, my dears, when he had had his meat, and a little milk in his saucer, he sat down in the sunshine and began to wash his face, just as he might have done had he been sitting on my old quilted skirt before the fire at home ; and I'm sure he looked as clean as a new pin,

for all the white about him was as free from dirt as new-fallen snow. I dare say all the while he was washing his face he was thinking to himself, "I wonder what we shall meet with next? I would start off home again, that I would, if the old woman would only let me eat up all she has got in her basket. When I peeped in, I saw something that looked a deal nicer than live mouse. It made me feel hungry only to smell of it." I dare say he had some such roguish thoughts as these in his head, for his eyes fairly twinkled again when I showed him the cold fowl in my basket, and just let him have a smell of it.

While I sat on the stile-step, resting myself and watching him, I thought he wasn't quite so handy at washing himself as dear old Browney, for she used to bring her head down and pass her paw over it, drawing her head up again as she drew her paw down, so as to brush one against the other, and so fetch all the dirt off. Then she had a way of wetting one side of her paw with her tongue, just as one might soap that part of the flannel we wanted to scrub with the most; while Wadding seemed to wet the whole of his paw inside, where he didn't so much use it, which, as I told him, "was a waste of soap and water," though his paw was the only flannel he had, and his tongue his washhand-basin. Instead of moving his head like Browney, he seemed as if he had got a stiff neck, so bolt upright did he sit,

having to raise his paw a deal higher than he might have done if he had only bent his stupid head to get his foot up behind his ears. I often wonder how little kittens first learn to wash themselves? I suppose their mothers show them when we are not looking, or in the night, when we are asleep; for we all know that cats can see better in the dark than they can in the daylight. I know I couldn't see to catch a mouse in the dark, if I put on the best pair of spec-tacles that were ever made.

All at once he left off washing himself, and sat with his paw up, as still as a mile-stone, to look at a pretty goldfinch that was pecking away at the yellow flowers of the groundsel; and having looked at it for a moment or two, after the bird he went, which, as it flew low, led him a nice dance over half the field, the very way that I wanted him to go. When he was tired of running after the goldfinch, he sat down in the middle of the footpath and began to wash himself again, as if waiting until I came up. What savage bites he did give the fleas! I shouldn't like to have been a flea that got between his sharp white teeth, I can tell you.

All at once I noticed him prick up his ears; then I saw him make himself quite flat, as if he glided over the ground without making any use at all of his legs, and then he made a spring at a gorse-bush that was all golden with its clusters of flowers, and I saw a little

rabbit dart out from under the gorse, and run away as fast as its poor legs could go, with Wadding after it. "A pretty chase there will be now!" said I, for I knew there were a great many rabbits all about the sandy ground where the gorse and heather grew, and which stretched away as far as the wood-side; and I thought, if the young rabbit runs into its burrow where its mother is, why, after it Wadding will go, and when he once gets under the ground in the rabbit burrow, I may bid good-bye to him, for he'll turn a wild cat, and take to killing rabbits, as I've heard a many of them do when once they have broken loose and taken to bad ways; and his end will be, he'll be shot by one of the keepers, as many a one has been before him, that have run away from their homes, and got mixed up with bad, wicked cats.

Then I thought that Wadding might get lost through running after that little wild grey rabbit; for I had heard men say who looked after them, that the warrens were like a town, full of all sorts of streets that crossed, and bent, and twisted one into the other, and went such a way under the ground, that when they have watched a litter of young ones run in, which they have wanted to give as presents to some of the tenants' sons, they have had to dig as far up as the wood-side to get them out. So I sat down on the third stile, and began to rub my spec-tacles to make them bright, so

that I might see about me a little more clearly, calling, "Puss, pussy!" you may be sure, all the time; when what should I hear but Wadding mewing to me beside the hedge, which he had got through; and I don't think I ever felt more pleased in all my born days, for I had almost made up my mind never to set eyes on him again, but that he would get into the burrows, and go poking about under the ground trying to find his way out, and only go in further and further until he died.

"Well, you are a good Wadding for coming back so soon," I said, stroking him, "and I'm sure you must be both hungry and thirsty too after such a run, and now you shall have the rest of the beef, and a nice saucer of milk. Only one more field, and we shall be half-way home; but what may happen before we get across it, is more than anyone living can tell." So I gave him all that was left of the beef and filled his little saucer with new milk, which he lapped so quick I could hardly keep count of the laps he made, so fast did his tongue go in and out—faster a good deal than you could say, "Lap, lap, lap," unless you moved your lips very quick indeed. How far he had run after the little grey rabbit, gracious goodness only knows, for I'm sure I couldn't tell, though I've no doubt, from the time I sat waiting, it was a long way, and that was why he was so very thirsty. Well, after he'd finished his milk and meat, and I had put his saucer away, we

became so friendly that he jumped on my knee ; for I must tell you, I had been in the habit of nursing him when I went to see him at Farmer Giles's, though he often told me that was the way to spoil a cat. Then Wadding climbed on my shoulder, and I stooped my head down and let him lay behind my neck, with his tail dangling down one shoulder and his fore feet hanging over the other, so that he had quite a nice bed.

"Now you are a good cat," said I to him, "and as you seem to be so tired through running after the little wild grey rabbit, I'll give you a ride." And so I did, for I made-believe that I was his horse, and sometimes when he stood up, I said, "Here we go humpty, dump, and there we go thumpty, thump !" then I trotted as well as I could with my stick, and my head down ; and sometimes he stood up and looked about him, as if he quite enjoyed the prospect, and then he laid down again, all his length behind my neck and shoulders, as if thinking over what he had seen, and so I "bumpty, bumped" and "thumpty, thumped" him over another field, he seeming as pleased as Punch at his ride ; and it made my poor old back and neck ache, I can tell you, through stooping and trotting and singing to him, and jolting him on my back when he stood up.

Well, do you know, just as we came to the stile, and while I was thinking to myself, "I wonder if he'll keep

where he is until I get over?" he gave such a spring that I felt every claw in his feet running into me as he jumped off my back, and into the hedge like a shot, and then up a great high tree almost before I'd time to straighten my poor old back. It was just what I feared the worst of all—he had caught sight of a squirrel, and was up and into the tree after it in a moment; for a squirrel can run up a tree, I can tell you, and so can a cat when it's so minded, as fast as you can run along a smooth, straight footpath; though how they move their feet so quick, and manage to keep fast hold with their sharp claws at the same time without falling, is more than I can tell. I know I couldn't do it, if I tried ever so.

"Ay, you are a silly cat," said I, looking up through my spec-tacles, where I could see him sitting at the thick end of a branch, while the squirrel was at the very thin end of the spray, that swayed up and down with him just as if a bird had settled on it, and his weight was no more. "Why, you would tumble down and break your neck if you were to play at 'follow my leader,' and go all over after him where he goes. You silly cat! don't you know that you are ten times as heavy as he is, and that you might as well expect to dance the tight-rope on one of my single sewing threads, if it were stretched out, without breaking, as to venture out where he is sitting now, and laughing at you, I haven't the

least doubt? Come down, before you break your neck. He can leap from that tree to the next with almost as much ease as a bird can fly, while if you were to try, you would come down with a 'squelch,' and maybe break every bone in your body, even if you did alight on your feet, as they say cats always do, but even then you might be lamed for life, and perhaps have to go upon crutches; and how could you catch a mouse then, I should like to know? Ah, if I had known how you would have served me," said I, looking up and shaking my fist at him, "I would have seen your nose made into cheese before I would have given you the last bits of that nice steak and that saucer of milk, which was almost as rich as cream. But who ever knew a cat to be grateful, I should like to know? Then to get up there, where you know I can't get after you, you rascal you!"

And I felt so vexed that I took up my stick and shook it at him, and I do think I could have found in my heart to have given him a good bang with it, if I could but have reached him. I gave him a good talking to, I can tell you, but whether he heard me or not, so high up the tree as he was, is more than I can say, for he looked no bigger than a squirrel; and as for the squirrel, I could just see it, and that was all, and at that distance it looked no bigger than a little jenny wren. Well, I sat down on the stile-step, rubbing my

fingers across my poor old chin, which is a way I've got when I don't know what to do for the best, as I didn't at that time ; for how long the squirrel might sit at the far end of the branch, or the cat wait for it at the thick end where he sat watching, would, I should say, have puzzled a wise man to have told. "Shall I go home and leave him where he is, or shall I wait for him coming down?" That was what I kept turning over in my mind while rubbing my chin, and a question I could have made answer to in a moment, if I could but have known—say to an hour—how long he would be before he came down. That was what I couldn't tell. I wished I had brought my small Bible with me. I could see to read the print in a good light in the middle of the day, and it would have taught me a little more patience, which at that time I had great need of.

Well, my dears, I said to myself, "Sitting here and rubbing my chin is not the way to get him down, so I'll give him another good talking to, that I will, and see what that will do." "Oh, you silly cat, you!" I said, looking up at him, and raising my voice, "come down, do. If you wait there till dark night, you'll never get him where he is, not even if he goes to sleep, for the branch would never bear your weight, as I've told you before, and if it would, he would hear the leaves rustle when you stirred, for he has got quite as sharp ears as

you have, I can tell you. Oh, how I wish I were near enough to throw a jug of cold water over you ! I would make you jump, that I would, you bad cat. You'd better take a friend's advice, and come down with a whole skin while you have a chance, for if the keeper comes with his gun, and sees you stuck up there, he'll take you for a wild cat, and shoot you, as sure as you're alive. Meat, meat, meat ! pussy, puss, puss ! Oh, drat you ! how you do but try my patience ! Four more fields have we got to cross, and if you go on in this way, and don't come down before it's dark, I shall leave you where you are, for I shan't light my lantern and come back to seek you then, I can tell you. And one more thing I have got to say, and I mean it too,—if you don't come down very soon indeed, all the supper you'll get of me to-night when we do reach home you'll be able to put in your eye, and not see a bit the worse for it, for if I still keep of the same mind that I am in now, you shall not even have so much as a smell. Pretty puss, pretty puss—come down, pussy ! Oh, you nasty brute ! I wish it may come a good sharp frost to-night, if you stay up there, and that when you wake in the morning, you may find a long piece of ice at the end of your nose. Milk, milk, milk ! meat, meat, meat ! Come down, pretty Wadding, and I'll give you a nice bit of cold fowl and a saucer of milk—pussy, puss, puss ! So you won't, won't you, you ugly wretch !

I wish I had a stone, and could throw it as high as you are, and hit the end of your tail ; if that wouldn't make you jump, I don't know what would. Oh, drat you ! I'm quite out of patience with you ; and to think that you should be the cause of vexing me and making me lose my temper after I have been so kind to you ! If something happens to you, it's no more than what you may expect. And I haven't had my dinner yet ! If I had but a pinch of salt and a piece of bread, I would eat every mite of the cold fowl I have in my basket for you, that I would, and not leave you a taste."

After calling and coaxing until I felt quite hoarse, I saw him begin to move ; and as I knew when he did come down it would be head first with a run, I made up my mind I would catch him in my gown-skirt, if I could ; for it was good thick stuff, made to last a long while, and I knew if I once got it over him, that, kick as hard as he might, he wouldn't be able to get out until I liked to let him.

I dare say it was very wrong of me—after calling meat and milk, and making him believe what a treat he would have when he came down—to deceive him in the way I was trying to do ; not but what I should have kept my promise if he had come when I called, and even up to the third or fourth time ; but after that—well, my dears, the less I say the better ; for instead

of giving him either meat or milk, I meant catching him in my gown-skirt if I could, and keeping him there as long as I was able to carry him. And that was deceit on my part, and very wrong indeed of me ; and I didn't forget to confess it was at night, when I said my prayers. It's a sin to deceive a poor cat, or anything else, by getting them to believe we are going to give them something, when all the time we don't intend doing anything of the kind.

It was just as I thought it would be ; for when he had reached the lowest branch, he came sliding down head first, his claws keeping a very slight hold of the bark of the tree, and at such a quick pace, that I don't think he could have stopped himself if he had tried ; so into my strong stuff, dark gown-skirt he jumped, and it was doubled up over him and he was safe as a mouse in a trap before he had even time to say, "You call this giving me meat and milk, do you ? For shame, Goody Platts, for shame ! You've told a story, you have, and you can't deny it !" And I couldn't have felt more shame than I did, if Wadding had used those very words.

I dare say he found it rather dark and close inside my thick skirt, and that the air wasn't quite so fresh and pleasant as in the high tree where he had been perched so long, watching the pretty squirrel. I thought of this as I walked along, and when he

began to "mew," I said, "Poor Wadding! he'll be quite stifled if I don't let him have a little fresh air." So I opened a little bit of my skirt, just big enough for him to get his poor nose through, and said, "Puss, pretty puss!" when I thought he "mewed" a little more lively than he did while shut up so closely.

Well, my dears, he seemed to enjoy the fresh air so much, that I made the hole a little larger, and began to rub his head, which he had poked through, seeming, as I thought, very pleased, though I didn't hear him purr. But, oh, the deceit of that cat! no sooner did he get his fore paws out, than he gave such a spring, that in trying to catch him I lost my balance, and down I came with all my weight on the ground, where I sat staring about me like a great goose, hardly knowing where I was; while he ran among some pretty lambs that were nibbling the grass, and made them scamper off all sorts of ways, for they seemed quite afraid of him.

I don't think he quite knew where he was for some time, as he kept running round and round, then stopping all of a sudden to look about him; and perhaps he had never been so far from home since he was a little kitten, and I first took him to Farmer Giles's. Nor do I think he could have found his way back to the farm, without chasing about a good deal at first, for we had come a long way, and

shutting him up in the dark in my thick stuff skirt, must have muddled his brains almost as much as if one had been led somewhere into a strange place that one had never seen before, with a bandage over one's eyes, then turned round sharp a good many times, until one felt quite dizzy, and after that left to find our way home again, just as we could.

At last I picked myself up in the best way I could, by putting my hands on the ground, for when a body gets old the joints become stiff, and it's hard work to get up from off the level ground, to what I used to find it in my younger days. When I got up, I called "meat, meat !" and "milk, milk !" and said, "I won't deceive you this time ;" and he came trotting up quite friendly, and rubbing his head against me, and I said to him, "Well, Waddy, I like you for this, as it shows that you are not a spiteful cat, nor one that bears malice ; and now you shall have a few bits of this nice boiled fowl, and a saucer of milk." And he did enjoy it, I can tell you ; and by giving him a morsel now and then as I kept walking along, I got him over the next field without any trouble at all, until we came to where a broad plank crossed a deep brook, the banks of which were grown over with bushes and trailing brambles, and no end of shrubs, some of them very prickly, and many of them green and pretty to look upon, as they drooped down and

touched the water, and danced about in the moving stream, into which their ends dipped. But something in the brook had caught Wadding's eye, though what it was I couldn't make out for a minute or so, until, leaning over the hand-rail—that was put up to take hold of, and keep you from falling in as you crossed the plank—I looked down, and saw a water-rat swimming about, and nibbling at the leaves that touched the stream. That was what Wadding was stopping to look at, and switching his tail about for ; and no sooner did I speak than it dived under the water, and was gone in an instant. "Why, what a silly cat you are," said I, "not to know that is a water-rat, and a deal harder to catch than a squirrel. He has a hole under the water into which he sinks in a moment, and then it runs into a dry road he has made higher up, and which leads to his nest under the bank, that is always dry, and far above the reach of the brook, unless when the fields are flooded after heavy rains. Then, when he's washed out of his house, he runs away, I suppose, until he finds a dry place somewhere, for he can't always live in the water, though he is such a good diver and swimmer. And he is deep enough to have a hole to run out at, somewhere behind the bank, when his house is flooded, or when he wants to 'take his walks abroad.' For, like the rest of us, he can't live long unless he has a

mouthful or two of fresh air now and then. And now that I've told you all I know about his house and his ways, come along home with you, for it's past my dinner-time, and I feel very hungry." So he gave a "mew, mew," as if to say, "All right, Goody—cut along; I've had my dinner; but you'll be home in time enough for tea, never fear;" and away we went again, for he didn't seem at all to want to go back the way we had come, though I knew I couldn't trust to him even for a minute, for if only a leaf stirred, he raised his head and stopped and pricked up his ears; then looked at me, as if to say, "What's that, Goody? if it's anything in my way, you know, I must be off after it; a cat has got a good many things to look after."

Then he started off after a blackbird, that was picking a poor snail to pieces, after having broken its shell; and when he had chased that into the hedge, he must have a hunt among the flowers and grasses that grew beneath; and while I watched him, I saw him jump back all of a sudden, as if he had been shot. Then he went up again to the same spot, and began to switch his fine long tail about, and I said, "What has he found this time, I wonder? Not a squirrel again, I hope; for when he gets up into the trees, I've no more chance of catching him than I have of dropping a pinch of salt on the tail of a

flying swallow." So I left the footpath, and went down the side of the field, to see what it was he was looking at ; and what should I find but a large hedgehog, coiled up in a round ball, and with nothing to be seen of him anywhere but his long, sharp prickles, turn him over which way I would. " You've met with your match, Wadding, this time, if you never did before," said I, turning the hedgehog over very gently with the point of my stick. " Well, a pretty prize you've found, Wadding ! you're about as lucky as John Twigg, who, after losing his shilling, picked up sixpence, and that was a bad one. The little wild grey rabbit might have been a meal for you if you had caught it, but as for the hedgehog, you might as well try to eat a pin-cushion with all the pins sticking out on both sides with their points upwards ; his spines would run into your nose like sharp pins, and they are nearly the same, and have heads inside his skin, just as if they were pins thrust through a piece of thick cloth. You may swear at him ! all your spitting will never make him open. I should have to carry him to where there's water, and throw him in, to make him do that ; for when he found he was in the water, he would unroll himself quick enough, and begin to swim for his life, and you would soon see his little black nose poking out, as he paddled his way to the shore."

But, in spite of all I said, Wadding wouldn't leave the hedgehog until he had turned it over a good many times with his paws ; and if he had kept rolling it over and over until he had reached home, he could not have done it any harm, for it was quite as round as a ball. "Let it alone," said I, "can't you ? There is not a more harmless little creature in the world than the hedgehog, and I'm sure there's plenty of room on the earth for you both, if you can but think so."

When we reached the next stile, he became so friendly that he got on my shoulder again, and I gave him another ride, singing to him in my old, cracked voice, "Here we go thumpty-thump, and there we go bumpy-bump," and jolting him up and down, just as I had done before. While he was standing on my shoulder and looking about him, trying to find something, no doubt, to give him an excuse for jumping down, and running off again, I said to him, "If you look straight before you, Wadding, standing up on my back as you do, you won't want my horn-rimmed spectacles on to see the thatched roof of my cottage, your new home ; though it is your old home, so far as that goes, for there you was born, and there I gave you the name of Wadding, and a very funny little Wadding you was. That's right—lie down ; it makes my poor old back ache, stooping to let you ride ; but I

don't mind that so much, so long as I get you home, which wouldn't take us more than ten minutes if you were a good cat, and trotted beside me all the way, without running first on one side then on the other, to see what this is, and what that looks like, instead of thinking how badly I want my dinner. You are a fine cat to look at now, but when you were a kitten, I thought you as ugly a little thing as ever I clapped my eyes on. Your head seemed nearly as big as your whole body, and as for your tail, it looked like a radish one throws away, that is too little to eat ; and your ears were such mites, I had to hold you close up to my spec-tacles to be able to see them at all, so much were they below the top of your great, round bullet-like, ugly head. Then you was such a stupid, too, and was five or six weeks learning to lap, for instead of putting your little tongue out, and drawing it in again, as a kitten that had any sense would have done, you used to stand with both your feet in the milk, which was enough to give you your death of cold, and then thrust your nose right into it, until it touched the bottom of the saucer ; and then, instead of being able to lap, you did nothing but sneeze the milk out again that you had snuffed up into your nose. Then you used to fancy that you could sneeze all the better if your fore feet rested on the edge of the saucer, and so you tipped it over, and upset all the

milk, many a time, on my nice clean floor ; then you would run off to Browney, creep under her, and go to sleep with as much content as if you had done something very clever indeed. And when you got a little bigger, you never seemed so happy as when you were teasing your poor dear mother by playing with her tail. Many a time have I said to you, 'Mind what you are about, young fellow, or you'll have one for your nob in a brace of shakes ;' for I could tell when she was getting angry, through the way she switched her tail, which, like a little donkey, you thought was done to amuse you, until she gave you such a pat with her paw as nearly sent you into the middle of the next week. Then I couldn't help laughing at the way you used to look at her when, after a deal of trouble, you had picked your little fat ugly ball of wadding up, seeming to say to her, 'If you call that play, I don't. You're a pretty mother, you are, to serve an infant that isn't weaned in that way. Why don't you hit one of your own size?' Then you would sulk and not go near her, but coil yourself up in any corner you could find, and go to sleep, and there lay until she came and licked you into good humour, and let you have a drop of you know what. Then, as you grew bigger you got to be such a Turk, and led your mother such a life, I was forced to pack you up, and take you to a boarding-school to learn better manners in Farmer Giles's barns and outhouses.

And now I'm taking you home again, to see how you'll behave yourself."

I suppose by that time Wadding had heard quite enough to make him blush at what he had done when he was a kitten, for he gave a spring, and off my back he jumped again, and run to where he saw a raven alight, a little way before me. I called after him, and said, "You'd better mind what you are about, for a raven has a sharp strong beak, and great long black wings, and he is not a fellow to be scared at a trifle." But Wadding, instead of paying any regard to me, went up to within a yard of him, setting up his back, and swelling his tail, and swearing as hard as he could, I have no doubt, though I wasn't quite close enough to hear him. Then the raven moved a step or two nearer him, pricked up his head, and no doubt in his way said, "What do you want with me? Who cares for you?" And he threw open his great broad black wings, making Wadding jump again, as he went hopping round him. But Wadding was a cat of great courage, and, as Farmer Giles said, wouldn't turn his back on the largest rat that ever run on four legs, for he had killed a great many on the farm. So after drawing back a bit, and laying himself out for a spring, he went full bang at the raven; but the bird was too quick for him, for he out with his wings, and went clean over the cat's back, leaving Wadding to come

full bump with his head against the stem of a tree which was close behind where the raven had been standing; and I do believe that the bird had shifted near the tree on purpose for Wadding to bump his head against it when he flew over him. I don't think my cat half liked the knock on the head he had given himself at all, for he doubled round, and again made a spring at the raven, and that time turned him clean over on his back, though he couldn't get fast hold of him anywhere, so strong was the beat of the raven's broad sooty wings. But he had had enough of it, for no sooner did he find himself on his feet than away he flew, leaving Wadding swearing and switching his tail, and looking up in the sky at him, as he went away with a croak, far above the tops of the tallest trees.

"If you live to be an hundred years old, as people say you do, you'll never forget the shaking my Wadding gave you," said I, looking down on the grass that was strewn with his feathers, and then up into the sky, where he was flying away as fast as his wings could carry him. "You're only a coward, after all; for it's no sign of courage to attack a poor sickly lamb that has lost its mother, or a little hare, or a young rabbit, that has hardly any strength at all. Why, you are big enough and strong enough to hold your own, I should have thought, against the finest cat that ever lived;

but I see all your courage lies in your croaking, and that frightens a good many weak-minded people, who believe you are brave because you begin to build so soon after Christmas, and often have young ones in March. But I know you better than I did. You may be able to stand the cold in such a thick coat of feathers as you wear ; but as for courage, I shall never believe in that again, after having seen you fly off in the way you have done." I suppose I had a dislike to ravens, through hearing the keepers talk about them preying on poor sickly and weak creatures that hadn't strength to defend themselves from their attacks.

While I gave Wadding a bit more fowl, and a drop of milk, for battling so bravely with the raven, I couldn't help saying to him, " You wouldn't have that, Wadding, if I had a slice of bread and a little salt with me, I can tell you, so hungry as I am. And what time I shall get home to have my tea, I'm sure I don't know. As for dinner, I've given up all thoughts of that long ago. I wish I'd left my key with little Jack Hardy, so that he might have had the kettle boiling for me by the time I got home. Yet it is a good thing I didn't, for instead of the kettle, I should have told him to have put me on a potato or two, making sure I should have been home by dinner-time at the very latest ; and if I had, they would have been boiled to smash an hour or two ago. And that nice thick mutton chop ! I do think I

could eat it under-done, if I had it here. Oh! how hungry I feel, surely; and when I shall be able to make myself a dish of tea, I know no more than the cat, and not half as well, perhaps, for that all depends upon what time he'll please to walk his body home." And looking at him, I said, "Pray, sir, can you inform me about what time that will be?" Well, my dears, he rubbed against me, and purred, and once or twice he tried to get his nose inside the basket; but I said to him, "No, no, Wadding; that will never do; for if you once find out that there's nothing more to be had, it will very soon be good-bye to you, for I'm very much afraid you're like too many in the world, only stopping for what you can get."

So we went on a little further, he running about and giving chase to all he saw, now jumping up and trying to catch a butterfly between his paws, then starting some great bumble-bee from out a globe of clover, where it was sucking up the honey; while as for birds, not one could settle down a moment to pick up a few ripe grass-seeds, or a bit of chickweed, or a morsel of groundsel, or a mite of plantain or shepherd's purse, but if it caught his eye he was after it like a mad-cap, as he is. And fine game did some of the birds make of him, through flying off a little way, then settling down again, until he came up to within two or three yards, when they spread out their little wings, and off

they went again, until he was nearly run off his poor legs. And then he didn't catch them.

Near the middle of the last field but two that we had to pass over, there was a large hollow tree, that was hundreds of years old,—so large that half a dozen people might stand with ease in the inside where it had rotted away, though it was still alive, and put forth a few green leaves from the small branches that shot up on the very top of its old decayed trunk. Of course Wadding must run out of his way to have a peep at the hollow tree, and go inside to see what it was like, as almost every one did who had never seen it before, and had the time to spare when they came that way. "I must go after you," said I, turning off the footpath, and keeping as close to his heels as I could; "for if I leave you to yourself, you'll be climbing up the inside and out at the top, which is like peeping up a great tall chimney; and if you once get perched up there, there is no knowing when you may take it into your head to come down again, or what you may find hiding in the inside."

Wadding was there a good while before me, and I could tell, from the way he run out and run in at the hollow entrance of the tree, he had found something. And when I came up, he "mewed" and looked at me, and put his head inside, then came back again, as if to say, "Do you go in and look, Goody. I've been,

and can't make it out at all. It's like a mouse, and yet it can't be one."

So I went in, for the ground inside was nice and soft and dry, through the decay of the wood, which had crumbled away until it was like sawdust. I stooped and looked about, for it was quite light, through the wide entrance at the bottom, and the open space at the top, and at last I saw something move. "It's a great nasty black toad," said I; "come away, or he'll be spitting at you." But when I looked again, I saw it wasn't a toad, for its back was covered with hair, and on each side of it was something that opened and shut, just like an umbrella. "It can't be a mouse," I said, "for I never heard of a mouse that carried an umbrella, though this one seems to carry two, one in each hand, and both of them have hooks, so that they can be hung up out of the way when they are not wanted." Then I began to feel a bit afraid, and thought it might be something very bad, for I saw that it had wings that looked as if they were made of leather, and spread out on whalebone; and as the body was hairy, I tried to see if it had club feet, for I began to think it was a little imp that had got out of the bad place, and was hiding in the tree until dark, when it would come out, perhaps, and fly away with the wicked person it had been sent for; for to tell you the truth, I felt a good deal scared, never having seen anything at all

like it in all my born days, except in a picture of the Bad Man in Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," where he is fighting Christian with fiery darts, which he keeps throwing at him. Though an old woman, I'm not one to be put in a fright for nothing, and I said, "If you were the Bad Man himself, I would have a poke at you, for it is said, 'Resist the devil, and he will flee.'" So without more ado I took my stick, and turned him over on his back.

What a jump Wadding gave when I poked it over and made it squeak. I then saw that it had four ears, and such a hideous nose and mouth as I never did see in anything living or dead before. When Wadding saw me turn it over, he began to show a little more courage ; and seizing it between his paws, threw it up, when it flew above us right into the highest portion of the hollow of the tree. "Why, what a stupid I am!" said I, looking up after it. "It's only a poor bat that has fallen down from its hiding-place in the hollow tree, after all." But then, I had never seen one on the ground before, and I'm sure Wadding hadn't, from the way he looked at it; and when you see them flying, it's nearly dark, and they go so quick, that you can neither see head nor tail so as to tell what they are like. But a bat isn't a bird, my dears, though it flies, but a beast; and a very ugly beast it is to look at, with its frightful face, leathern wings, four ears, and hairy body. I won-

der what it wants four ears for? Perhaps it has two to listen with when it's asleep, and the other two when it's wide awake.

Wadding wasn't a bit afraid ; for when he saw it fly up inside the tree, and not go out where it was open at the top, he wanted to climb up after it. But I wouldn't let him ; for I lifted him down, and carried him in my arms until we came to the footway again, and he followed me like a good cat, up to where the road made a bend very near the wood-side.

I now began to feel quite faint for want of my tea, you may be sure, as I had had no dinner ; and very sorry I was that I didn't have a bit of lunch and a glass of Farmer Giles's home-brewed ale when he pressed me. Not but what I could have eaten a few mouth-fuls when I said "No, thank you ;" but it was the time I thought more about, making sure in my own mind that I should get back with my cat and have my dinner ready by one o'clock, the hour at which I always dine. If I had known what I did then, my dears, I would not only have lunched with Farmer Giles, but have brought a bit of a snack with me that would have served for my dinner. But none of us can tell what will happen before the day is over, and I began to say to myself, "Whatever shall I do, if I don't get home by tea-time?" And I took out the bit of cold fowl and looked at it, then shook my head, and said,

"No; it would only be like giving Wadding a thimbleful of milk when he's very thirsty, and would stand me in no stead at all. I should only feel more hungry after tasting it, and I can but be hungry; and it's my own fault, for I might have brought plenty with me if I had liked. And I haven't got him home yet; and what freak he may take into his head when we get into the next field, close by the wood-side, is more than any one can tell, and more than I would believe if I even saw it printed among the coming events in my Old Moore's Almanack, which tells a great many stories, saying it will be fair when it rains, and wet when it turns out dry."

Somehow, I had a dread of that wood-side, not only on account of the wood itself—for if he ran in there, I knew I might as well hunt for a lost needle in a long mile walk buried under fallen leaves, as hope to find him again in that great wood—but also on account of the keeper's lodge I should have to pass with him. For he had a great many dogs, though they might be out with him; but then the cats were sure to be about, and whether they would come out and try to make friends with Wadding, or he would rush in over the fence to have a fight with them, was a cause of great trouble to me; for after all my thinking, I couldn't tell no way how it might be. How strange it was that I, who had sat down the night be-

fore, and, as I thought, turned all things over in my mind, both for and against getting my cat home without any trouble, should never so much as give even the wood-side and the keeper's lodge a thought, so near as they were to my cottage. It was the keeper's cats that often came to the window and tried to get my poor Browney out of a night.

There was a great white Tom, which I do believe was Wadding's father ; and suppose he were to come up and see his son, and know him again, what was more likely than that he should wish to have a little private talk with him ? For I suppose cats that are parents do talk to their grown-up kittens at times, and advise them how to get on in the world ; they would be very bad fathers and mothers if they didn't. I may be wrong, but when I have seen seven or eight cats all sitting down very close in the field before my cottage, I have said, " I shouldn't wonder if that's a school, and that the one in the middle is the teacher, and they are learning manners." And who can prove it wasn't a cats' school, I should like to know ?

The part of the wood I had to pass was called Narrow End ; the field bore the same name, and the lane that led down beside it, and which I should have to cross, was called Narrow End Lane. Not that this has anything to do with my cat, any more than that a portion of the wood had been cleared and many of

the trees cut down years ago, so as to form a portion of Squire Thorold's park, who was the lord of the manor, and a very good man he was. But from Narrow End the wood began to widen out, and was full three miles long and two miles and a half wide at the longest and broadest part. I believe, in her younger days, my poor Browney knew every inch of it; and no wonder the keeper said at times he was afraid he should have to shoot her, for many a little pheasant and partridge has she brought home in her mouth. But she left off those bad habits in her old age—perhaps only because she was no longer so able to catch them as she had been.

Well, my dears, it turned out just as I feared it would. There sat his old father Tom, sunning himself on the palings of the keeper's garden; and no sooner did he see his son than down he jumped. And he didn't at all act as a father ought to have done, for he began to set up his back and swear at Wadding, instead of being glad to see him. But I'm sorry to say, instead of turning round and going away, and saying, "If you don't know how to behave yourself, I do, and I'm not going to disgrace myself by picking a quarrel with my own father; for I know what the duty to one's parents is too well for that, though I was taken away from my mother when I was only a little kitten. So I wish you good-day, and hope

you'll improve in your manners ; for there's plenty of room for that, I can tell you, though you are my father."

But no, instead of speaking to him, as he ought to have done, in that way, and so teaching him to bear and forbear, he began to swear back again, harder than his father, if anything, and to set up his back higher ; and as if that were not enough, he up with one of his paws, and fetched his old dad such a pat on the side of the head as knocked him clean over. Then old Tom looked at him for a moment, as if he said, "What! take a blow from a boy-cat like you, and not return it? You rascal! how dare you strike your father?" Then Wadding showed his teeth, and swore louder than ever, and switched his tail about quicker, and made it thicker than I had ever seen it before, and went up to his father as if he said, "I went up to you quite in a civil kind of way, and smelled of your nose, and hoped I saw you well, and wanted to rub sides with you, and say how sorry I was we had lost dear old Mother Browney ; when you, like an old blackguard as you are, began to swear at me and show your teeth—when did you use a tooth-brush last?—and set up your back and spat at me. Was that the way to receive a son, I ask you? Now, what will you do? I'm ready for you, old fellow, in any way you like." And he went at his old father again,



making his white hairs fly all sorts of ways; as he got him down and turned him over, and dusted his jacket, both of them swearing very bad indeed all the while they were fighting, until at last old Tom seemed as if he'd had enough of it, for no sooner did he get up from under Wadding, than he shot off over the garden paling and into the wood, taking with him such a beating as I believe he hadn't had for many a day; for the keeper had told me that he was quite a tyrant over all the rest of the cats.

After thrashing his father, Wadding came up grumbling, as if he thought he hadn't given him quite enough; then he ran back and jumped on the paling, trying to see if his father was about anywhere, so as to give him a little more. For I could tell by the thickness of his tail that his passion hadn't quite cooled down, and I was rather glad the old chap had got safe away, though it served him right; for his son went up to him, so to speak, with quite a smile on his face, as if he really was glad to see him, and shake paws and be the best friends in the world.

"Well, surely," thought I, "he'll go home now content enough, and I shall be able to get a dish of tea to comfort and support me and take away this faintness." For it was quite my tea-time when he had done thrashing his old father, and I waited with great patience while he washed himself and put his coat a



little bit to rights ; for a cat can't fight without getting his dress a little out of order.

But while he was washing, brushing his hair, and making himself a little bit tidy, as pretty a little grey cat came up to him as ever I saw in my life. I saw at a glance it was a young-lady cat, and a very sweet "mew" she had ; and I have not the least doubt she had come to thank him for giving old Tom such a beating, for she went up to him and began licking his head, then she had a roll on the grass, and he had a roll beside her. "Oh, drat it !" said I, "this is worse than fighting, for that is soon over, and there is a chance of one getting home and having one's tea ; but when it comes to playing, there's no telling when that may be over. I must start you, young lady, or I shall not get home until supper-time." So I clapped my hands, and said "Hish ! hish ! hish !" making a hissing noise to drive her away, and crying to her, "Get out of that !" when she ran past the garden fence, down the wood-side, and then through a gap right into the wood, with Wadding after her as fast as he could gallop.

"I've done it at last !" I said, standing in the gap and looking into the wood, where I could see nothing else but trees. "This is the worst of all," I said, as I stood thinking for a minute or so what I should do. "If I go into the wood I shall get lost myself, and be

worse off than the Little Babes I have read of in the old ballad, for they did find a few blackberries to eat, but there are none now, nor won't be, fit to gather, for this three months to come. And I'm sure I don't think I could live until morning without having my tea. And if I did go into the wood, I could no more tell which way my cat's gone than I can tell where that bee's going to that has just flown past me. Besides getting lost, how do I know what I might meet with in the wood? Robbers, they say, hide in woods and caves of the earth; and while they take the trouble to go out and seek for people to rob, one may rest sure as to what they would do if we got lost and found them. Of course, they would think we wanted robbing very bad, and was tired of waiting, so had come to them for that purpose. Not that they would find much on me, for I keep most of my money in the savings'-bank, where it brings me a little something in, even while I'm asleep; for my dear old Gaffer left me very well off."

While I stood in the gap—without making up my mind whether I should go into the wood to look after my cat, or leave him there to be eaten up by wild beasts, and go my way home and get my tea, before I fairly sank down for the want of something—I bethought me that the bottle was more than half full of rich new milk, and that if Wadding came back he

wouldn't want more than a saucer full, let what might happen, so near as I was to my home. So I took the bottle out of my basket, and had a good hearty drink ; and I felt so much better after it, that I was able to call out "Puss ! puss ! pussy !" again, though I dare say Wadding was romping about somewhere with that wild young-lady cat, too far off to hear me. I'm sure if I'd had plenty of bread and a bottle full of milk, I could have fasted until supper-time ; for I began to give up all thoughts about tea, as the sun was then going westward fast.

I didn't like losing my cat, nor I didn't like going into that great wood, for I knew foxes and badgers, weasels and polecats, snakes and vipers, had often been found there ; not that I was a bit afraid of any of those, though a badger can bite, and a viper can venom ; and I hoped my poor Wadding wouldn't fall into the clutches of either the one or the other. But what I feared more than any of those was, that there might be wolves hiding somewhere in the wood, for I know there used to be plenty of wolves in England in former years, and why shouldn't there be now, I should like to know ? I read in the papers of sheep having been worried in the night by strange dogs ; and I say to myself, "Strange dogs, indeed ! Did they go close enough up to them to see that they were dogs ?" Of course not. And the wolves are too deep ever to

show their faces by daylight ; and who can tell a wolf from a dog, I should like to know, when it's so pitch dark you can't see your hand before you ? There will be no mercy for my poor Wadding, if he should happen to run into a wolf's den. You may say that no one has seen a wolf in this country, except in a wild-beast show, for hundreds of years. What does that prove ? Why, that they are so sharp, they only come out in the dark, when no one can see them, eat up a flock of sheep, and, happen, carry a few legs and shoulders and loins of mutton with them into their dens for their whelps, and to eat on moonlight nights, when they might be seen if they came out : for not seeing wolves is no proof that there isn't any, is it ? Besides, where there was one sheep for them to feed upon hundreds of years ago, there is one hundred now. No ; they keep under the ground in the day-time, and only come out on dark nights, when they can't be seen ; and that's why people say there are no wolves now, and that they are strange dogs which worry their sheep. I hope my poor Wadding may not meet with one of those strange dogs in wolf's clothing, and that I may be kept far enough from the reach of their paws.

" Oh, bother ! " said I, going through the gap, and into the wood ; " if wolves are never seen by daylight, why, I shan't see them, and I think I'm rather too old

to go and run my nose into their dens. Let me see ; the sun's straight before me, and that must be the west ; when I come back, it will be behind me, and of course I shall find myself where I am now, or very near. Well, I won't go very far, to make sure."

So I went along, with my staff in my hand, feeling my way, and thinking to myself, "If I should alight on a wolf's den covered with leaves, why, my stick will go into it before I do, then I can step aside." I stopped every now and then, calling "Puss, puss, puss !" and the first thing that sprang up close beside me was a great pheasant. What a noise it made with its wings ! I did jump and feel a little afraid, I must confess, and wished I had been at home, with my poor feet resting on my warm hassock, having my tea. I saw scores of bunches of young nuts in the hazels ; but they were so soft, I could squeeze them quite flat between my thumb and finger. "Three or four months hence," said I, "and they would be brown-shellers, and I 'could shake them out of their cups, and if I had my nut-crackers with me, quite enjoy one or two of them." I looked well about me, but neither before nor behind, to the right nor to the left, did I see the least sign of my Wadding, though I kept calling "Puss, puss !" every minute or so, as I felt my way along.

I saw a long-bodied weasel, who is so savage, that

if he gets hold of either a hare or a rabbit, he never leaves go till he kills them; no matter how big they are, nor how fast they may run, they have to carry him until they drop, he eating his way into them all the time. I also saw either a stoat or a ferret, but they are so quick in their motions, you hardly know one from the other, except that the colour is not the same. "Bless me!" said I, looking up, "the sun is on my left! I must turn round a bit, and keep my face to it, or I shall be getting lost; this comes through watching the stoats and weasels and ferrets. And how low the sun is sinking! I'm sure it's no use thinking of tea now, for it's past the time for that, and I shall have to make my dinner, tea, and supper all of one meal. Puss, puss, puss!"

I had gone a good way into the wood by this time, and had been watching a marten run up a tree, where it would lay down quite flat among the leaves, until it saw a bird come within its reach, when it would be up and upon it in a moment. One had made its nest in Farmer Giles's barn, and killed no end of hens and chickens before he trapped it, and found five young martens in its nest, which, he says, would have eaten up every fowl he had got about his great farm, before the winter was over, if he had not killed them, for they are able to destroy a chicken when they are two or three months old. It is a pity they are so cruel, and

so fond of poultry, for there is nothing in this country that has such long, soft fur on its back as the marten.

While I'd been thinking about the fur on the back of the marten, I'd kept poking along with my back to the sun, and seeming to go away from it; but whether I had gone to the left, or turned to the right, for the life of me I couldn't tell any more than a month-old child. There was the sun plain enough sinking down, and seeming to touch the tops of the trees; but how had it got behind me, and all on one side, and which side was it? I could tell my right hand from my left well enough; but somehow I knew that if the sun was right I was wrong. How was it? I sat down on a fallen tree, and began to think. This must be the south, and that the north; but if I step on this side, the sun is before me just the same as if I step on the other, and whether I had been going north or south, or west or east, or all the four ways together, like going round a ring, I couldn't make out any way. "Well, a pretty fix I shall be in," I said; "no dinner, no tea, no supper; and then to be lost in the wood all night, and have no bed to lie down upon, not even a mattress on which to rest my weary old bones. Then, if there isn't wolves, there are foxes and badgers, ferrets, and no end of things that would come and whip off a poor old woman's nose before she had time to put her hand over it, if she were asleep. And this is all through

not bringing my big basket, with a lid to it to put the cat in. Oh, deary me!—oh, deary me!—no dinner, no tea, no supper, no bed, no home; but, like poor Robinson Crusoe, left all alone in a great wood, which is worse than an open island, for he could look about him and see what was coming, while I can see nothing but trees; and what there may be hidden behind them watching me, and ready to eat me up as soon as it's dark, I shall know soon enough, I'm afraid. Oh! Wadding, Wadding! Browney would never have left me in the way you have done, to perish in a lonely wood, after giving you meat and milk and cold fowl, and only tasting a drop of milk myself. Oh! Wadding, Wadding!"

Well, my dears, while I was saying "Wadding," as it were to myself, instead of calling him, he came up with the other little cat, and began rubbing against me, as if he were quite pleased to find me again. Then the pretty little cat went quite the other way to what I had been going when Wadding came up, and he went after her, stopping now and then, and "mewing," as if to say, "This is the right way, Goody. Follow us, and you'll be out of the wood in no time." And so I did, and so I was; and when I got to the wood-side, I was so pleased that I gave them both some of the cold fowl, and all the milk there was between them.

When she had lapped up the last of the milk, the

little lady-cat set off home as fast as she could run, while Wadding, instead of running after her, jumped on my knee; for so tired and weak and hungry was I, I was forced to sit down and rest a little while, though I had only another field to cross, and round by the big pond to go, to reach home.

"A pretty dance have you led me this blessed day," said I, stroking him as he coiled himself up on my knees; "and nothing have I had between my poor old lips since breakfast time but a drop of milk, and now the sun is setting, and in an hour or so it will begin to get dark; and though I feel very thankful indeed that you and the other cat came up, and led me out of the wood, when I was lost, yet I can't depend upon you for all that; and now I have you safe and snug I'll keep you, for I'll not trust you out of my sight any more this day, if I can help it." And I drew my gown-skirt tight over him, though I fancied he gave a "mew," as if to say, "And this is the return you make for my kindness, after showing you the way out of the wood when you were lost. Oh, Goody Platts! Goody Platts! how can you hope to prosper in the world, after so much deceit, getting me to lie down in your lap, and to purr while you stroked me, and then to shut me in a dark prison-house like this?" I felt quite as much as if he had said all that, my dears; but then I thought he had had plenty to eat and drink, while I had only

tasted a little milk ; so I said to him, " If you were in my place, and had nothing since breakfast, you would just do as I am doing."

I carried Wadding easy enough, until we came to the great pond in the last field that fronted my door. There was a large farm on the other side of this field, which was called the Home Close, and the reason why the pond was so far from the farm-house, and so near to my cottage, was, that a land spring had been found where the pond was, and as it was never empty, the old pond close by the farm had been filled up, for it was often dry, and the new one made very close to my garden hedge. I had a right of way to the pond, as well as the farmer who owned the Home Close, and there my ducks and geese went and dived, and swam about when they pleased ; and as we each knew our own, there never was any bother with them, nor anything else, except with a spiteful old gander of the farmer's, that would hiss and try to bite the heels of all who came near him. I believe he hated me, because I used to get my broom, or anything I could lay hold of, and drive him across the field towards the farm every time I saw him about the pond. Many a laugh had the farmer about my battles with his old grey gander ; but I didn't mind that, so long as I drove him away from the ducks and geese, which he was always biting. He once had a good kick from the heels of a

cart-horse he was biting, and that kept him quiet for a long time ; but no sooner was he cured than he broke out worse than ever, and became more spiteful than he was before. My dear old Browney had many a fight with him.

The wretch knew in a moment that I hadn't got my broomstick in my hand, so came hissing at me full run, with his wings spread out ; and as one hand was fast, holding Wadding tight in my gown skirt, I had only the other—in which I carried my basket—to defend myself with, so I gave the old gander a knock on the head with my basket, and while hitting him, the skirt slipped somehow from my hold, and out jumped Wadding. No sooner did the gander see the cat than he ran at him, hissing, with his wings out, and tried to bite him. Wadding's back was up in a moment, and at the old gander he went, making his feathers fly all about the edge of the pond ; and no sooner did the gander find that he had met with his master, than he turned round and tried to escape into the pond. But before he got into the water, Wadding made another spring at him, and came with all his weight upon the old gander's back, and with such force that I fancy his claws got fast in the feathers. But no sooner did the gander feel Wadding on his back, than he threw out his great broad wings, reached the middle of the pond in a moment, and dived under the water.

It was all done in less time than it has taken me to tell you, and as there was so much white and grey about them both, I could hardly tell which was Wadding and which was the gander, as they darted by like a flash of lightning into the middle of the pond, so much did the feathers and the hair seem to be all of a piece. When I next caught sight of them, the gander was swimming out on one side of the pond, and Wadding paddling his way out on the other to where I stood, and glad enough he was to come to me then, though he was dripping wet, and I should say never had had such a ducking before in all his life; for a cat doesn't like water, though many of them are fond of fish. I never saw a cat in such a drowned state in my life, for dipping him head over ears seemed to have taken almost every bit of breath out of his body, for he fairly panted again, and I do believe he had a great deal more to drink than he either liked or wanted, for the water ran out of his poor mouth, and he "mewed," as if pain, though I knew he was more scared than hurt. He was well washed, that he was; and it took him a long time after we got home to tidy himself up again, for I had no trouble with him after the gander had given him such a good ducking, I can tell you.

I was quite pleased to find that little Jack had got in at the kitchen window, and lit the fire and boiled the kettle for me. Poor lad! he had been all the way

to Farmer Giles's to meet me, so he must have passed over the fields while I lost my way in the wood. I could see the lad had been crying, and he told me that he was afraid something was wrong, and that I was either lost or killed, when he could neither see nor hear of me anywhere. I sent him into the hen-house to get me two or three new-laid eggs, while I cut myself a rasher from off one of my home-cured hams ; and I made such a meal as would have shamed me to have eaten before anyone but little Jack, for I do really think that I ate and drank almost as much as I should have done in the whole three meals if I had taken them at the time I always did, instead of all three at once. Little Jack could hardly get on with his own tea for staring at me, and when I told him I had not tasted anything but a drop of milk since morning, it seemed as if his bread and butter would have choked him, so sorry was little Jack, for he had a very feeling heart, and I shall think of him in my will.

As for Wadding, I never saw a cat eat so much in my life. He couldn't have made a more hearty supper if he had been for three months in the fresh air by the seaside. He seemed as if he had found room enough to stow away as much as two or three cats, or that, like myself, he was making dinner, tea, and supper out of one meal. I thought he never meant leaving off—first

meat, then bread and milk, after that milk by itself, then he "mewed" for more meat. "Oh, drat you!" I said, "if you go on in that way, you'll fairly eat me out of house and harbour." But I suppose it was the dipping the gander gave him that made him so hungry, for I have heard people say who have bathed in the sea, that after they have been dipped they could almost have eaten their old shoes, if they had been cooked. What a washing he gave himself before the fire! and when he had done he looked quite a fresh cat to what he did when he stood with all the water running off him beside the pond. Then he coiled himself up and went to sleep on the old quilted petticoat lined with red flannel, which had been his poor mother's bed, and when I got up, at a late hour for me, I found him just where I left him, and as sound asleep as he was when I went to bed. Poor fellow! like his old mistress, he was tired, for he must have gone over some miles of ground the day before, after one thing and the other.

He jumped on my back while I was stooping to light the fire next morning, and began dancing in his way, with a paw up at a time, purring and rubbing his head all about my neck and shoulders, as if to tell me he had not forgot how kind I had been to him the day before. Then he went outside the door, and began to eat a cold potato I had thrown on the pavement for the fowls; and I stroked him, and said, "I can see you

are not a saucy cat, Wadding, though I should have thought you had eaten enough last night to last you for a day or two. But come in doors, and I'll find you something better than that for breakfast." While I was talking to him, one of my hens came up with her chickens, and flew at him, making such a noise, as if she said, "What are you meddling with my potato for? it was thrown there for me and my chickens." And whether it was the noise she made that drove him in, and gave him a bit of a fright—for she raised her voice as loud as she could while scolding him—whether it was that, or the way she flew at him, that caused him to go in, I can't say; but he just spit at her, as if to say, "If it wasn't for your little chickens, old girl, and that I know what it is to have lost a mother myself, I would make my breakfast off you, in spite of Goody;" for I know he could have torn her to pieces, and eaten her up in almost no time, if he had been so minded, though a hen has courage enough to fight to the death when she has chickens.

After breakfast, he went smelling and peeping about in every hole and corner, no doubt to see where the mice had their runs, as if he knew that was the work he had got to do, and those were the thieves he had to look after; for I had found a great hole eaten in my cheese, and all the cream lapped off my milk, once or twice since I lost poor Browney; and when I heard

the mice scamper about and squeak in the night, I, had said to them, "Yes, you have a nice time of it just now, and can do what you like; but in a day or two I'll bring Wadding home to look after you. Why don't you go across the field, and eat away at the great corn stacks there are in the rick-yard, instead of robbing a poor old woman, as you are doing now?"

Well, my dears, I've had Wadding some time now, and though he's a fine cat, and has a good temper, and is a first-rate mouser, and is very clean and very fond of me, and is not at all saucy, but eats anything I choose to give him, still, he has a many faults, though I believe it would be hard to find anyone that hasn't, whether they are cats or anything else. He is the most artful cat I ever knew in my life, though I am getting up to his tricks now. If he wants to go out and make a night of it, he doesn't go mewling and rowing about the house after he has had his supper, as some cats would, but coils himself up on his bed, where he pretends to be fast asleep. But if he has made up his mind to go, and I open the door ever so gently, he is up and out before I have time to look round. Then, in very cold weather he gets into my bed, and creeps right down to the very foot of it, under the bedclothes, and lays there, no doubt laughing to himself, while I stand at the open door in the cold, calling "Puss! puss!" until I'm quite hoarse again.

But now, I'm deep enough to turn the bedclothes down to see if he's there, before I go to the door and stand in the cold calling him. As for keeping him out of the bed, there would be no doing that, unless I sewed all the blankets and sheets to the bed, and didn't leave an open place anywhere for him to get in at. And a pretty time it would take me of a night to unpick all the stitches, to say nothing about the sewing I should have to do every morning. Then the birds he kills! Oh, it's quite shocking to see the pretty feathers that I find about the garden sometimes. But I send him out with a rattle to his heels, I can tell you, if he brings one in-doors; for it makes me quite sad to see a dear little robin, or a goldfinch, or a wren, panting as if their little hearts would break, when he lays them on the floor; and more than once I have taken a stick to him, and told him what a brute he is, so sweetly as they sing. For I'm sure there are times when I could almost fancy that they were little angels, when I listen to them and see them perched on my fruit-trees. But my Wadding has no ear for such music, though very often when he can't get at them, he'll rear himself up at the foot of the tree they are standing upon, and spit and swear at them, as much as to say, "Don't come here and disturb me with that row, when I want to lie down in the sunshine and go to sleep. I'd make you sing to some

other tune if I had you under my paw!" Then he's such a one to climb. Bless you! there's hardly a tree within sight of my cottage that he hasn't been up; and where two alders meet and form a bit of a bower, which I have to go under to get to what I call my kitchen garden, there he'll lay in wait for me, and as my head nearly touches the top of the arch when I pass under, he'll whip his paw out and claw my cap off, then, as if he had done something very clever, poke his head down for me to rub it, purring all the time.

But the worst of all is, if he's out for the night and it rains and blows, he'll make me get up and let him in. For one night, while he was rowing outside in the rain, I made up my mind that if a flood came and washed him away, I wouldn't get out of bed to save him if I could; so what did he do but make a spring clean through one of the window panes, and carried away nearly all the glass without hurting himself the least, when he jumped on to my bed, with his dirty paws and all dripping wet as he was. So, you see, I must either get rid of him or get out of bed to let him in when there's a storm, or else make up my mind not to have a whole pane left in the room where I sleep, which is on the ground floor; for I must tell you there is no second-floor to my cottage, and that it stands on too much ground for me to require any

upper rooms, so I have no stairs to climb when I go to bed. When I heard the glass break, I began to call out "Thieves !" and thought robbers were breaking in, until I felt the cat jump on me, all over wet as he was.

Much as I like him in many ways, I'm afraid I must get rid of him ; but after making up my mind that I will do so, I always end by feeling afraid that, with all his faults, I may go further and fare worse. But oh, he is such a thief ! Not but what I feed him well, even until he leaves off because he can't eat all I give him ; but let me put anything away for myself, no matter what, though he has but the minute before left his meat because I had given him more than he could eat, and he'll steal what I want to save, if he can but get at it any way. It's true enough I often serve him out for it ; for if there's a bit of his own meat that he's too saucy or too full to eat, and which he would perhaps leave if I gave it him a second time, I've only to put it on a plate and place it on the shelf, as if I wanted to save it for myself, and he'll steal and eat it, even if it isn't sweet. That proves that he likes to thief, and enjoys what he steals a deal more than he does that which is his own, even when it's as good again. He's a born thief, a thief in grain, stealing even from himself when he can steal from no one else ; and I do believe, if he wore breeches, he would

pick his own pocket, only to keep himself in practice, and through a love of thieving.

Then he has a way of making friends with any low-bred, half-starved stray cat he may chance to meet with, and one that you can see with half an eye lives at "Number Nothing, Nowhere;" and this shows a sad want of respect, both for himself and for me. Fancy any decent person coming up to my cottage, and seeing such a mangy, flea-bitten, hungry-looking wretch as he very often picks up and brings home, sitting on my door-step, or sunning itself on my window-sill! Of course, a stranger would think it was mine, and go away and say, "What a pinching, screwing, hard-hearted old thing Goody Platts is, to starve her cat as she does! I could count every bone in its body. She ought to be ducked in the pond, for starving the poor dumb creature as she does!" And they wouldn't believe me on my oath if I told them how kind I was to my own cat, after seeing some of the scarecrows Wadding brings home to disgrace me. Not that I dislike him for sharing his meat with the poor outcasts, for that shows that he has a feeling heart; but there's reason in all things, and I'm sure if I were to take in all the poor people to bed and board that I relieve in the course of a year, instead of a cottage I should want a place as large as our church; for I never say no to anyone who asks for a piece of bread, though many a

time I have found the fowls picking up the slice I had cut from one of my nice new loaves, and which the beggars, who five minutes before had said they were dying of hunger, had thrown away, the wretches! But I did my duty to them, like a Christian woman, and they would be called to account for being so wicked and telling such falsehoods. Not that I could say the bread was wasted that went to feed my poultry, but that made them no better. Oh! the deceit of some people, and of many cats that I have known, is past all bearing, and would try the patience of the best hermit that ever lived in a mossy cell, and had never anything but earwigs and spiders and black-beetles to trouble him.

Some say a good cat is equal to a weather-glass for telling when there's going to be a change in the weather, and I do believe there's something in it, though it doesn't do to depend upon them too much. I used to say to Browney, when I had been washing a few things, and wanted to hang them out to dry, or spread them over my black-currant and lavender bushes, which beat all the scents you buy at the shops,—I used to say to her, when I saw her sitting with her back to the fire, "Well, Browney, are we going to have rain?" And I assure you that once or twice I have seen her look up at the window, as if to see what kind of a sky there was, and then coil herself up on her bed and go to

sleep. And very often, if there wasn't rain that day, some was sure to fall a few weeks after ; and if that wasn't telling when the weather was setting in for wet, it was very near doing so.

Wadding isn't anything like so good a weather-glass as his mother was, for you can never depend upon how he'll sit from one minute to the other, unless when he's asleep, or while I'm nursing him ; for he sits with his tail, or his head, or his sides to the fire, just as the maggot bites him. And I often think at times he's a little cranky, he takes such strange notions into his head, and does such out of the way things. Sometimes he'll stretch himself out on the dresser-shelf, or coil himself up in one of the drawers ; and one day I shut him in, and couldn't think where the noise came from that I heard, until I got up and stood still to listen, when I opened the drawer, and out he jumped. I have known him sit close to the fender and look up the chimney for half an hour at a time, but what he could find there to attract his eyes so long, I never could make out at all.

One Sunday he followed me into church, and got under my seat without my knowing he was there, until the singing began, when he reared himself up on the seat while I was standing, and rested his paws on the ledge where I place my psalm and prayer-book, causing all the people to laugh—who knew no better—when

they saw his head rearing up above the pew. But the instant my neighbour Blake, who sings through his nose, joined in the psalm, Wadding jumped over the pew, and shot out as if he had been scalded, as if he couldn't stand that.

Wadding will follow me out into the village street when I go of an errand, and though I don't mind the children calling out, "Here comes Goody Platts and her cat!"—because I know I should have been as likely to have joined in the shout as any of them, when I was a slip of a girl, if I had seen an old woman with her cat after her, for children will be children ; and if they never use any worse language than that, they won't commit any very great sin.

But I did dislike that low butcher boy, for setting his ugly cur on my Wadding when I went past the shop, and wasn't at all sorry when the cat scratched his nose, and sent him in yelping like a cur as he is. He runs and hides under the chopping-block now as soon as he sees my Wadding coming ; and as for the butcher boy, I gave him a good box of the ear, and he's been civil ever since.

I forgot to tell you, that the second day I had Wadding home I took him into the garden, and showed him where his mother was buried under the Cat's-head apple-tree, and read over to him the lines I had made, and which little Jack had scratched with the point of

my scissors on the slate that we had reared for her tombstone. And though he seemed to listen while I read to him, yet I thought he showed a great want of feeling, for a blackbird flew down on the garden walk just as I had got to the middle of the verse, and off he went after it as fast as he could scamper, seeming to care no more for his poor old mother than he did for the last mouse he had killed. Should I be spared long enough to write Wadding's epi-taph, I'm very much afraid I shall not find it easy to tell the truth about him and say much in his praise, for he leads a very wild life at present, and keeps all sorts of hours, and mixes with all sorts of cats.

I do think at times I shall get rid of him, and try to find some other cat that is a little more steady; but when I call to mind that Browney was his mother, and think of the many years I had her, it makes me bear with him, and I say to myself, "If I hadn't Wadding to try my patience at times, I shouldn't know hardly what trouble was; and I live in the hope that as he grows older he will grow better." But I can never forget that day when, though I had neither dinner nor tea till late at night, and ate all my three meals at once with my supper, I might have spent the night in the wood but for Wadding, though it was through him I was so near being lost.

So it is, my dears, in this life; for with our dim

sight we too often take good for evil, and evil for good, and meet with few mishaps but what might be much worse were it so Willed. Losing Wadding was a trial; but losing myself, and having to stay all night in the wood, would have been a more severe one; and the loss of the cat, which I then thought a great trouble, was the means of saving me from a greater loss, for I don't think I should ever have found my way home that night if it had not been for Wadding.



THE END.

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